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Personal Study through the Bible-22 (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)

In the last lesson, I noted the difference between reading the Bible (which also applies to listening to a Bible class) for pleasure and really studying the Bible for yourself. There is no excuse for any believer not to be involved in serious *personal* study the Bible for himself. In fact, it is unconscionable for any believer, especially a doctrinal believer who is quick to talk about the Word of God being alive and powerful, not to be involved in active personal Bible study for himself. The biblical illiteracy among modern believers is appalling. It is a sign of deeper spiritual problems with God, the plan of God, and the spiritual life. How can anyone claim to love God's Word if they do not have a desire to dig out its truths? The sad fact is that very few Christians have even read the whole Bible. If you have, then you are in a small minority of Christians. If you have really studied the Bible for yourself, you are even in a smaller minority. It is amazing that many Christians seem to have real strong opinions to offer on the nature of Christianity, what should be taught at church, or some favorite doctrine, yet so few have really studied the Bible *for themselves*. Such hubris is amazing.

This biblical ignorance is not limited to laypeople by any means. Every year many churches ordain people who are virtually ignorant of the content of the Bible. Many pastors do not even have the ability to teach a book of the Bible, let alone develop grand metaphysical and theological themes. I have even heard of pastors living in fear that someone will actually ask them about a biblical theme or passage. If you look at their résumés, it is no wonder since most of their training is in crisis management and gaining leadership and counseling skills. What's worse is that most of the courses they do take in theology or in the Bible contain a heavy dose of liberalism. Most seminaries do not teach the Bible, let alone all of the requisite logic and philosophy that are preconditions to understanding the nature of truth, without which pastors do not have the able to develop the grand themes of the Bible for their congregations.

In case you think that it is just Pastor Don who is "putting" responsibility on the believer for studying his Bible *for himself*, consider the fact that the Bible itself actually has much to say about the importance of *studying* the Bible. See what Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17 say about *studying* the Word of God. Think about the implications of these passages. I will revisit them in the next lesson. Before I leave these exhortations for personal Bible study, I would like to reiterate that by studying the Bible for yourself, you will not only gain great confidence in its great truths, you will also get more out of every Bible class that is taught. You will also be protected from becoming a clone of any pastor or a blind follower of his teachings. As we have all been taught, "it is not the man, it is the message." And God left the message for you to *study* for yourself.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. We have two eschatological sections here. Chapter four deals with the Rapture and chapter 5 deals with the period starting after the Rapture, namely the day of the Lord, which kicks off the tribulation. These two periods are very distinct in Scripture. Note carefully the difference in our context. Note that with respect to the Rapture, Paul did not

want them to be ignorant (4:13). This implies that they were ignorant of the timing of the Rapture. Yet, in his discussion of the doctrine of the day of the Lord, he states that *he does not need to write to them* concerning the “times and seasons,” i.e., the general sequence that leads up to the coming of the day of the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, he tells them that they already know the facts concerning the times and the seasons, namely that 1) the coming of the day of the Lord will be like a thief in the night (2); and 2) the removal of the church precedes the day of the Lord (4, 9). They knew “full well” about the day of the Lord. What they did not know about was the nature of the Rapture. The Old Testament does not mention the Rapture anywhere, but it is filled with passages on the day of the Lord. Read Joel 2:1-11 on the day of the Lord and fill in the blanks (NASB):

2:1, All of the _____ of the land tremble.

2:1, The ___ of the Lord is coming (wrath of God begins on earth).

2:2, a day of _____ and _____

2:3, a ___ consumes before them (judgment).

2:4, and like ___ horses, they run (warfare)

2:6, before them [armies] the people are in ____ .

2:7, And they each ___ in line [military].

2:8, When they burst through the _____ [military victory].

2:10, Before them the ___ quakes, the ___ tremble [compare verse w/Rev. 6:12-13; 8:12]

2:11, The day of the Lord is indeed _____ and very _____, and _____ can endure it?

The day of the Lord is nothing less than God’s wrath on this earth, which is so vividly described in the tribulational passages of Revelation under various types of judgments. This is totally different from the comforting events that surround the Rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

The Thessalonians were living in the day of grace, the present dispensation during which God is gathering out both Jews and Gentiles to form one body-the church. When the Rapture occurs, living believers will be taken up to be with the Lord in the air and then before God the Father as Christ promised in John 14:1-2. This is comforting. There is nothing comforting about God’s wrath on this earth. When the Rapture comes, the church age will be brought to a close and the day of the Lord will then begin. The sequence is clearly laid out in the Thessalonian passage. If someone mocks the notion of the Rapture, all you have to do is open up your Bible and take him to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and show the basis for it. This does not mean that he will believe you. However, that is not your responsibility. All you need to do is show the basis for your belief, your epistemological justification for believing the Rapture. By the way, it is the most natural and plain reading of this passage. It does not require the original languages or deep metaphysics to see how one coming of the Lord is comforting and the other is going to be a dreadful wrath that is coming to this earth, which Paul back in 1:9-10 said that the believers would be rescued *out from!*

In Thessalonians, the Rapture ends with “therefore, comfort one another with these words.” But if we look at the events of the day of the Lord in Revelation 5 we see a much different picture, one of judgment where we have a heavenly scene of Christ pictured as a slain, but victorious Lamb. It is the Lamb who will open the seals on a scroll that will result in untold “seal” judgments on this earth. It is the Lamb who breaks all six seal judgments, which are all

summarized as “the wrath of the Lamb” and “the great day of His wrath” (Rev. 6:16, 17). Thanks be to God’s grace that we never need fear such wrath; rather, we can comfort one another with the truths of the Rapture! Just like Paul instructed! Imagine that!

In ‘Ehyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove